




CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: October 1, 2012

TO: Comprehensive Planning Committee

FROM: Lucy Thompson, Principal City Planner 

SUBJECT: *Great River Passage Master Plan: Proposed Addendum to Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan*

BACKGROUND

The Great River Passage Master Plan is the City's long-term plan for unifying the entire length of Saint Paul's Mississippi riverfront (17 miles of river, 26 miles of shoreline) into one grand and comprehensive vision to be realized over the next 30-50 years. The Great River Passage Master Plan sets the stage for sustainable parks and open spaces; ecological restoration; economic development; and connection of the city, its neighborhoods and people to the Mississippi River. It builds on 15 years of Saint Paul's efforts to fully realize what an incredible environmental, recreational, physical, economic, cultural and historic resource the Mississippi River is. Starting with the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* (1997), these efforts include the Mississippi River Corridor Plan (2001), the Great River Park chapter of the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* (2007), and various district and small area plans.

Over the course of nearly two years, the Great River Passage (GRP) Master Plan was prepared by a multi-disciplinary consultant team headed by Wenk Associates, based in Denver, CO, working with an inter-departmental City staff team and a 56-member task force/technical advisory group that included representatives from district councils, City Council offices, National Park Service, MN Department of Natural Resources, Ramsey County, Friends of Saint Paul and Ramsey County Parks and Trails, Friends of the Mississippi River, and Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation. Community direction and feedback were gathered at 29 public input sessions, including focus groups, community task force meetings and open houses. In addition, a website was maintained by Parks staff to receive input throughout the 2-year planning process on ideas presented at task force meetings and early drafts of the plan.

THE GREAT RIVER PASSAGE MASTER PLAN

The GRP Master Plan contains goals, objectives, strategies and visionary plans based on three core principles for riverfront public and private development, established in the *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework*:

- More Natural
- More Urban
- More Connected

The Master Plan explores the application of these principles in four sub-areas, or reaches, of the Mississippi River as it travels through Saint Paul:

- The Gorge
- The Valley
- The Downtown
- The Floodplain

The Master Plan is primarily a parks and open space plan that envisions the river corridor as an interconnected system of parks and trails. Beyond that, the Master Plan envisions connections between public spaces along the river and to private development in neighborhoods adjacent to the river. It recognizes that the river corridor is Saint Paul's most significant environmental and recreational amenity, while also recognizing that it serves urban development just beyond the river's edge.

TWO-TRACK PLAN ADOPTION

Adoption of the GRP Master Plan will occur along two parallel tracks:

- adoption by the Saint Paul City Council of the entire document, including strategy and project recommendations, and a proposed administrative structure to staff the effort; and
- adoption by the City Council of certain sections of the Master Plan as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan.

Adoption of the Entire GRP Master Plan

This track consists of a recommendation from the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission directly to the Mayor and City Council. The full document goes beyond what is appropriately part of the Comprehensive Plan, in that it contains specific park project recommendations and a strategic plan to organize the Department of Parks and Recreation to focus on the GRP. The Parks and Recreation Commission recommended the full document to the City Council on June 20, 2012.

Adoption of Certain Sections of the GRP Master Plan as an Addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan

This track consists of a recommendation from the Planning Commission (at the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Commission) to the Mayor and City Council. Certain sections of the GRP Master Plan are being recommended as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan in order to:

- align the goals and objectives of the GRP with those of the other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, especially land use, transportation, and parks and recreation; and
- ensure that the GRP Master Plan is official City planning policy, and therefore guides public and private investment within the Passage.

The sections of the GRP recommended for adoption as part of the Comprehensive Plan include:

- general goals and objectives, by principle (more natural, more urban more connected) and reach (Gorge, Valley, Downtown and Floodplain);

- graphics that illustrate key planning and design concept recommendations; and
- goals and objectives related to regional park vision plans, with corresponding graphics.

ROLE OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

The role of the Planning Commission is to make a recommendation to the City Council on the broader vision, goals and objectives in the GRP Master Plan. In order to advise the Planning Commission, staff's review focuses on the consistency of the GRP Comprehensive Plan document with the City's Comprehensive Plan chapters on land use, transportation, parks and recreation, housing, historic preservation and water resources management. Where the vision, goals and/or objectives are not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, the Commission may recommend amending either the GRP Comprehensive Plan or the relevant existing Comprehensive Plan language to achieve consistency.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION COMMENT

Section 73.04 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code requires the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) to review City "studies" that relate to the architectural heritage of the city. In practice, this authority has been used to allow for HPC comment on area plans, district plans and any other plans being considered as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, as noted above, there is a Comprehensive Plan chapter on historic preservation, so it is appropriate to have the HPC review the GRP Plan in light of its consistency with the Preservation chapter. The HPC's resolution from September 20, 2012 is included in the attached set of comments.

The HPC commented on the large GRP Master Plan, not the "abridged" GRP Comp Plan Addendum, so some of the concerns/issues are more appropriately considered by the City Council when it looks at the full document. In addition, many of the HPC's comments are about the Appendix, which is considered background material and not policy. Staff will forward the HPC resolution to Parks staff and the City Council at the next stage of review.

The key issues raised by the HPC relevant for the Planning Commission's review are:

- The GRP Master Plan stresses interpretation of historic and cultural resources almost to the exclusion of protection.
- There should be a map showing designated sites within the Great River Passage in order to establish a baseline for the recommended inventory/survey work.

The GRP Master Plan stresses interpretation of historic and cultural resources almost to the exclusion of protection.

The objectives and strategies on p. 38 speak mostly to interpretation of historic and cultural resources, with minor mention of the need for an inventory of cultural and historic resources. The HPC requests a stronger statement supporting the identification, evaluation, designation, preservation and protection of historic resources.

Staff response: The Historic Preservation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan clearly supports the identification, evaluation and designation of historic resources, and calls for historic context studies of Saint Paul parks, parkways and cultural landscapes, as well as of the Mississippi River in terms of navigation and commerce.

Suggested changes: Amend Objective 2 (and move it up to be Objective 1) on p. 38 to read: "Identify, evaluate, designate, preserve and protect historic resources within the Great River Passage." The three bullets under the objective remain the same.

There should be a map showing designated sites within the Passage in order to establish a baseline for the recommended inventory/survey work.

The GRP Comprehensive Plan Addendum contains a very general map identifying historic and cultural resources within the Passage. Sites are coded by theme (e.g. commerce and control, food, health), but no information is presented on what the site consists of, whether it is designated, why it is a significant representative of the theme, etc.

Staff response: The Plan should contain a strategy to recommend preparation of a baseline inventory of designated sites and districts in the Passage. This would be a starting point for the recommended survey work.

Suggested changes: Add a fourth bullet to (new) Objective 1 (see above) to read: "Prepare a baseline inventory of designated sites and districts in the Great River Passage."

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

The Planning Commission released the *Great River Passage Master Plan: Proposed Amendment to Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan* on August 10, 2012, and held a public hearing on September 21, 2012. The hearing record remained open until 4:30 p.m. September 24, 2012. Thirteen people spoke at the public hearing, some of whom also submitted written comments. In all, written comments were received from 11 parties. Most comments were submitted on behalf of organizations (agencies, district councils, etc.), including Friends of the Mississippi River, Friends of Pool 2, Friends of the Parks and Trails of Saint Paul and Ramsey County, National Park Service, Highland District Council and Wilderness Inquiry. Many of the comments referred to language that is in the larger GRP document, not specifically to the Comprehensive Plan Addendum being considered by the Planning Commission. This memo responds to those comments relevant to the Addendum, but all public comments will be forwarded to the Mayor and City Council, and have been shared with Parks staff.

In general, all of the comments stated support for the Great River Passage Master Plan. In person and in writing, people praised the City of Saint Paul for its commitment to the protection and celebration of the Mississippi River, and its foresight in thinking about the long-term future of the Mississippi riverfront in Saint Paul (a "legacy project" akin to H.W.S Cleveland's plans for the Minneapolis and Saint Paul park systems that gave us

the Chain of Lakes in Minneapolis, the Grand Rounds in both cities and Como Regional Park). It is also clear from the comments that the City will have many partners for plan implementation over the next several decades.

Issues or concerns can be categorized as follows:

1. Inclusivity of the public process that created the draft Master Plan
2. Status of the Comprehensive Plan addendum – what does adoption mean? – and public input once the Master Plan is adopted
3. Additions to/corrections of/disagreement with proposed Plan language

1. Inclusivity of the public process that created the draft Master Plan

Testimony was given on both sides of this issue. Everyone recognized the breadth and complexity of this undertaking, and appreciated the monumentality of the task before us all. Those who felt there had not been enough public involvement (in terms of both the number of people involved and the diversity of opinions sought) also felt that the planning process did not allow enough time for community members to adequately review, understand and analyze such a complex document. Those who felt there had been adequate public process praised the City for its active engagement of community groups, district councils, individuals and agencies; felt that there were many opportunities for input; and believe that the consultants and City staff were responsive to public input.

Staff response:

There is no question that an undertaking of this scale is complicated and demanding. Staff believes that the citizen involvement process to prepare the GRP Master Plan was thorough and inclusive. Four “layers” of formal input were established: 1) a Leadership Committee comprising City department heads, the Mayor’s Office and the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation; 2) an 11-member Steering Committee of City staff from five City departments and the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation; 3) a 14-member Technical Advisory Group comprising experts from key riverfront-related agencies, organizations and advocacy groups; and 4) a 56-member Community Task Force comprising representatives of river advocacy groups, district councils, City Council offices, funding agencies, river businesses, utilities and educational institutions. The consultant team was a multi-disciplinary collaboration of professionals from 12 companies, with expertise in landscape architecture, city planning, urban design, parks planning, transportation, finance, historic preservation, branding and public art. In addition, six focus groups were held on specific themes – natural resources, water resources, river-oriented industrial uses, public art and arts programming, transportation and recreation. In total, 29 input sessions were held, including open houses. The planning process lasted almost two years.

Suggested changes:

None.

2. Status of the Comprehensive Plan addendum – what does adoption mean?- and public input once the Master Plan is adopted

There is a fair amount of confusion in the community regarding what adoption of both the full Great River Passage Master Plan and the portion being recommended as an addendum to the City's Comprehensive Plan means. In fact, there is confusion about the distinction between the two documents. As stated above, the full Master Plan includes an overarching vision, goals and objectives for the Passage, specific project recommendations, cost estimates and a proposed City administrative structure to implement the Plan. The portion recommended for adoption as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan includes the overarching vision, goals and objectives for the Passage; graphics that illustrate key planning and design concepts; and goals, objectives and strategies to guide subsequent updates of regional park master plans. The Comprehensive Plan addendum does not include specific projects and costs, nor does it recommend a particular administrative structure for implementation.

In particular, concern was expressed during the public hearing that recommendations for improvements to regional park facilities were not adequately vetted in the community; and there was also outright opposition to some of the recommendations (e.g. the proposed environmental education center at Watergate Marina). There was concern that, if the Plan is adopted with these recommended projects in it, the projects will be a "done deal."

Staff response:

Adoption of the condensed GRP document as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan is intended to apply the very broad strategies of the City's Comprehensive Plan (in the areas of land use, transportation, parks and recreation, housing, historic preservation and water resources management) to the Great River Passage. Since the GRP Comprehensive Plan Addendum is still quite broad, it gives direction for subsequent planning efforts that explore specific projects in more detail. It does not take the place of subsequent planning efforts. Parks staff have repeatedly stated that the concept plans for the regional parks contained in the GRP document are just that – concept plans. They are intended to give general direction as to how individual parks should be improved, based on the vision, principles, goals and objectives of the Great River Passage. However, before any work is done, regional park master plans will be updated, and Parks staff will set up a formal community process to advise them on specific changes to each regional park master plan based on the GRP Master Plan.

Suggested changes:

Staff recommends that text be added to the GRP Comprehensive Plan Addendum clarifying the status of its recommendations, and the City's commitment to community involvement in subsequent planning efforts to amend regional park master plans.

3. Additions to/corrections of/disagreement with proposed Plan language

Some commenters recommended specific changes to the document. They are noted below, with a staff response and suggested wording changes, where appropriate.

a. Friends of the Mississippi River

Environmental education center at Watergate Marina (page 61)

The Great River Passage Comprehensive Plan Addendum recommends transforming Watergate Marina to become the center of Saint Paul's environmental and outdoor education programs. In keeping with the concept of a natural-resource-based park, the Plan recommends restoring the environmentally-degraded marina site and abandoned lagoon area, building a new environmental education center, and providing other services that will strengthen it as a hub for river-oriented community recreation.

The Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR), Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County (FPT), and Highland District Council (HDC) expressed concern about the proposed environmental education center and its potential impact on the environmental character of its floodplain site. While the Friends of the Parks and Trails recommended the education center be removed from the Plan altogether, the other parties suggested adding language to guide the design of the facility.

Staff response: Watergate Marina is a very appropriate place for a new environmental education center; staff supports retaining the recommendation in the Plan. With the understanding that the specific location and design of the facility (and other proposed facilities at Watergate) will be determined as part of a subsequent community input process, staff supports adding general language to the Plan to further guide that work.

Suggested changes: Add the following language to the first paragraph on p. 61: "The redeveloped marina and associated structures and facilities will be sensitively designed and scaled to minimize intrusion on the natural characteristics of the park and river."

Restoration of Hidden Falls Creek (page 51)

FMR is requesting the Addendum include language in support of restoring Hidden Falls Creek on top of the bluff as part of the redevelopment of the Ford site. Staff believes it is premature at this time to suggest a treatment of upper Hidden Falls Creek in isolation from the many other issues that will be studied during the Ford master planning process.

No change is recommended.

More bluff-top open space at Ford Motor Company (page 51)

FMR supports expanding Hidden Falls Regional Park into the Ford site. As noted above, staff believes it is premature at this time to consider this expansion in isolation from the many other issues that will be studied during the Ford master planning process.

No change is recommended.

Shepard Road (page 55)

FMR is concerned about the distance between the two entrances to Crosby Farm Regional Park at Davern and Elwood. The Addendum shows a third connection across Shepard Road into the park at Rankin, which is approximately midway between Davern and Elwood. Whether that entry will be a stairway or path will be determined after further study during the update of the Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan.

No change is recommended.

Island Station (page 69)

FMR is concerned that improvements along Randolph Avenue between Island Station and W. 7th Street are not recommended. On the contrary, on page 69, the Addendum contains an objective that supports redevelopment activities and pedestrian-friendly public realm investments along Randolph Avenue to better connect Island Station and other riverfront activity to W. 7th Street.

No change is recommended.

West Side Esplanade (page 78)

FMR is concerned that private development is shown fairly close to the river's edge, and they want to ensure that river-adjacent uses are publicly-oriented and complementary to the river. The Addendum shows just that: a broad public esplanade on page 78 and text on page 79 that supports first-floor uses opening onto the public esplanade.

No change is recommended.

Fish Creek (page 90)

FMR is requesting that trailhead improvements be recommended at Fish Creek. The Addendum shows a trailhead at this location. While City Parks staff agree that a Fish Creek connection is important to open up Pig's Eye Lake access at the south end, the Ramsey County Parks and Trails Systems Plan states that there is limited potential for trail activity here due to steep terrain. Including a trailhead in the Addendum will trigger additional study by Ramsey County Parks staff.

No change is recommended.

b. Saint Paul Port Authority

River-oriented redevelopment opportunities (page 27)

The Port Authority is concerned that the River-Oriented Redevelopment Opportunities map shows a portion of the Crosby Lake Business Center as appropriate for redevelopment. Noting that these are strong businesses in a business center that is only 16 years old, the Port asks that they be removed from the map.

Staff response:

Staff agrees that these businesses should not be indicated for redevelopment at this time. However, if the properties become available for redevelopment within the timeframe of the Great River Passage Master Plan (30-50 years), river-oriented development opportunities should be considered.

Suggested changes:

Add a note to clarify the intent of those areas designated as "river-oriented redevelopment opportunities" on page 27.

Riverview Industrial Park (page 79)

The GRP Addendum recommends intensifying and diversifying the land use mix in the Riverview Industrial Park, as an extension of the land use pattern in the West Side Flats Urban Village. New uses are not intended to necessarily replace existing industrial/office uses, but to use land more efficiently by converting some of the large surface parking areas to active land uses where appropriate. The Port states that this recommendation is premature, and should be studied in more detail during the update of the *West Side Flats Master Plan and Development Guidelines*, scheduled to begin in 2013.

Staff response: The idea of increasing the density and mix of land uses in Riverview will be explored as part of the update of the *West Side Flats Master Plan and Development Guidelines*. Staff feels this is an important concept, and feels it is appropriate to introduce it in the GRP Addendum as a concept to be explored further during the West Side Flats planning process.

Suggested changes:

Amend the fourth objective on page 79 to read:
"Explore the intensification and diversification of land uses in the Riverview Industrial Park.
Replace the first sentence with:
"As part of the update of the *West Side Flats Master Plan and Development Guidelines*, the Riverview Industrial Park should be studied for increased density and land use diversity, recognizing that industrial uses are an important job source for the community and an important contributor to the city's tax base."

c. Kent Petterson

Mr. Petterson spoke at the public hearing and submitted two sets of written comments. Those relevant to the GRP Addendum are noted below. The general comments about the planning and community input process, the status of the Addendum (what does adoption mean?) and the City's commitment to continued public input during the amendments of specific regional park master plans were addressed on pages 5-6 of this memo.

Staff Response to September 20, 2012 Written Comments

2 - The GRP Addendum does not support a vertical connection from the termination of Walnut Street in Irvine Park to Shepard Road and the Sam Morgan Regional Trail. Mr. Petterson is correct that this recommendation is in the District 9 Area Plan Summary. City staff believe that, with the existing at-grade connection at Shepard and Chestnut/Eagle Parkway and continued support for a vertical connection at the High Bridge, a third vertical connection at Walnut Street is not warranted. Walnut Street should be shown as an on-street bike/pedestrian connection from 35E to Irvine Park and Chestnut/Eagle.

Amend the map on page 35 to show Walnut Street as an on-street bike connection from 35E to Irvine Park, Chestnut/Eagle and the river.

3 - The general direction that the emphasis at Hidden Falls Regional Park be for nature-based recreation is not a specific program use. Rather, it is a general direction for future investment in park facilities, based on its location in a "more natural" part of the GRP, its existing character, and its role in the larger system of parks throughout the Passage and city. How this gets interpreted through specific projects will be determined in the update of the Hidden Falls Regional Park master Plan.

No change is recommended.

4 - See #3 above.

5/6 - Shepard Road is currently a major barrier between the river and adjacent neighborhoods. Redesigning Shepard Road to be a safer and greener connection is a key move of the GRP Addendum. The street sections indicate options for how to achieve this objective, and have been vetted with Public Works staff. Public Works staff are comfortable with removing the street sections from the Comprehensive Plan document, but leaving them in the larger Master Plan.

Remove proposed Shepard Road street sections from the Comprehensive Plan Addendum.

7 - The language regarding Victoria Landing is general enough to guide the work of the Victoria Park Design Advisory Committee, without pre-determining how the site's history will be interpreted. It should stay in the Addendum.

No change is recommended.

8 - The language regarding the creation of a river balcony along the downtown riverfront is appropriate for the Addendum. How the balcony is designed, and how it is integrated into redevelopment on key downtown sites, will be determined through more detailed site design.

No change is recommended.

9 - See comment on page 7 above re: Watergate Marina, with suggested amended language.

10 - The half-page summary of *Chapter 7: Delivering the Vision* from the larger document is appropriate for the Addendum. All of the Comprehensive Plan chapters have an Implementation section. Minor wordsmithing could be done to clarify that the implementation strategies are addressed in more detail in the larger document.

Revise text on page 95 to clarify that these are recommendations in the larger document but not appropriate for a Comprehensive Plan Addendum.

12 - See above on page 7. A new environmental education center at Watergate Marina is not a duplication of services; it is an extension or increase of services.

No change is recommended.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Comprehensive Planning Committee:

1. forward the public hearing testimony (including written comments) to the Planning Commission;
2. forward the changes to the Great River Passage Comprehensive Plan Addendum recommended in this memo; and
3. with these changes, recommend that the Planning Commission find the Great River Passage Addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan consistent with the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan; and
4. recommend adoption of the Great River Passage as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan.

Attachments

